

Collectanea.

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full of people. To our left was a shrine set up against the jungle wall in that quarter. In a space left clear in front of the shrine stood what can best be described as a sort of "maypole," and between the "maypole" and the spectators was a small area enclosed by lengths of coloured cloth stretched between upright sticks. Within this area could be seen a small temporary booth, with human figures moving about a fire, over which, the Chief Headman informed me, rice was being cooked to be offered to the goddess. 123
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When we reached the clearing the ceremony had not yet begun. I was conducted to a seat of honour in the front row of the spectators, and sat there for some minutes looking round with interest on the scene, which was lighted here and there by the flare of torches, and listening to the monotonous throb of the tom-tom, which was apparently being played somewhere close by in the jungle. Suddenly the tom-tom took on a more staccato note. Excitement rose among the spectators; and presently, from a gap in the jungle wall on my right and rather behind me as I sat facing the shrine, there defiled into the clearing a procession which slowly threaded its way through the ranks of the spectators to the clear space in front of the shrine. In this procession there were carried two wooden ceremonial swords,* which were to be prominent in the dances which followed. In front of the shrine the procession stopped, and a ritual of some sort, the exact nature of which it was impossible to gather in the semi-darkness, was gone through. [373]

At the conclusion of the ritual at the shrine a red flag, bearing embroidered upon it the sun and moon and two human figures, and another device the details of which I was unable to distinguish, but which was possibly the figure of a ship, the emblem of Kapalpe, was hoisted upon the "maypole." This was, perhaps, the formal beginning of the ceremony, for after the hoisting of the flag flowers were brought in baskets, as a mark of respect, to the Chief Headman and myself. Under the Chief Headman's [576]

* These swords resembled the ceremonial swords (*van haduwa*) seen by the Seligmanns only in the ceremony of the invocation of Rahu Yaku at Sitala Wanniya. (fifty miles from the place at which the ceremony here described was performed), and illustrated on p. 236 of *The Veddas*.

3. NESTS AND HIVES

*This is the time to climb the steep ;
Up through the shadowy woods to grope,
Over the stones where the lichens creep.
On to the crag that crowns the slope ;
To the wild bees stronghold hushed in sleep.*

J. STILL

NESTS

[36] IN dark fearsome caverns, and down the sides of dizzy ravines, the little
222 edible-nest swiftlet builds its dainty nest fashioned of hardened saliva
and moss. Those who think they know better will tell you that the all
but invisible specks, sometimes seen high away in the empyrean at dusk,
are flights of these birds on their way to the sea to gather salt foam with
which to build.

222 One of the favourite pursuits of the Veddas is the collecting of these
[439] nests for barter. They call the birds *kudukarayas* (nest-makers) and their
nesting caves *kudu galges*. These caves are often deep gloomy recesses
[373] only entered with lighted candles (made by squeezing a column of bees-
wax round a central wick of cloth or bark) to scare away the scores of
poisonous snakes (*karawalas* and *mapilas*) that gather there to eat the
eggs and young. Sometimes the nests stud the steep sides of narrow
[417] gorges, and are then taken by the aid of cane ladders let down from above.

The nesting-places are a secret the Veddas guard closely. When they
took me on one of their expeditions it was on the condition that no bearers
came. A hard climb brought us to near the summit of the tree-covered
mountain side. "Cho-ho-ho," shouted the Veddas as a warning to
possible bears. The approach to the cave was over-run with *aralu-wel*
(used for bows) and *niyande* (of which waist strings are made). The cave
itself, surmounted by an enormous rock the fall of which seemed imminent,
was dark and stifling; and it was quite a time before one could discern
the cup-shaped nests that clung in clusters to the vaulted roof. A
Vedda handed me a parent bird he had trapped, a tiny-beaked, brownish
thing, with sweeping wings, black feet and unswallow-like tail. It was
quite a time too before one realised that there was a commotion in the
air, and that little wraith-like forms were flitting in and out in sore
distress "Swish, swish; wing, wing; twit, twit; kisiri, bisiri;
takara, takara; kata, kata, kata," as from fairy castanets, came the
barely audible sounds. Outside, these were louder, "Chara-chiris, chara-
chiris; che-week, che-week, che-week," they twittered in futile resentment.
But to these sounds the ruthless despoilers were deaf, as, mounted on
heaps of stones, they scraped away with knife or arecanut cutter the
trim nests from their tenacious attachments, leaving only those with
eggs behind, lest the colony be killed outright. On a boulder near by
[asa] was a fire-place where the young had been roasted, as Kauwa of Divulana
had described.

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"Over the edge." (Page 89)

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Honey-gatherer, girl with torches and stake,
ready to descend. (Page 89)

[Facing p. 87]